

# THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS, FAN IDENTITY AND RISK BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA

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**Abstract:** The object of the research was to investigate the relationship between personality traits (activity, aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism/anxiety and sociability) with fan identity and risky behavior (health-risk behaviour and exploratory behaviour). More specifically, we are interested in whether the possession of certain personality traits leads to the development of a fan identity and a tendency towards risky behavior. The aim of the study was to determine the link between personality traits, fan identity and risky behavior of young people in Serbia. The sample consisted of 82 young people of both sexes, living in the Republic of Serbia, mean age  $AS=22.50$ ,  $SD=2.91$ . The following instruments were used in the study: Zuckerman-Kulman Personality Questionnaire which is designed to determine the degree of expression of five basic personality dimensions: Activity; Aggression-Hostility; Impulsive Sensation Seeking; Neuroticism-Anxiety; Sociability, Fan Identity Questionnaire, which measures the degree of identification with a particular sports club and Risk Behavior Scale which consists of two subscales: Exploratory behaviour and Health-risk behavior. The results show that activity as a personality trait is positively related to fan identity, while aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, and neuroticism/anxiety are related to health-risk behavior, and aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, and sociability are related to exploratory behavior. People who prefer challenging and difficult tasks, show a lot of energy for work and for the tasks they are given, tend to be generally active and show a stronger identification with the team. Sports and spectatorship are some of the ways in which people who are prone to aggression, impulsive sensation seeking, and neuroticism can satisfy their need for adventure and excitement.

**Keywords:** personality traits, fan identity, risky behavior, young/adolescent

**Field:** Social sciences

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In adolescence, young people tend to engage in various behaviours to gain experience and skills that can help them define new social roles. However, the tendency to try out new life opportunities does not always have to be accompanied by behaviours that have an adaptive function. The socio-psychological orientation indicates that all behaviour, including behaviour in sports activities, is determined by the interaction of a variety of factors, one part of which comes from the social environment, another from our interaction with the social environment, while the third part results from the unique characteristics of the individual itself, i.e. personality traits. In this paper, we will consider an approach that emphasises individual factors in determining the propensity to engage in risky behaviour and the formation of fan identity. Through their attitudes, emotions and behaviours, fans show a special attachment to a particular sports organisation because the role of fan is considered central to the identity of a person who identifies strongly with the team (Foster, Stelzer, & McRae, 2000; Santek, 2020). The study of fans, especially young fans, requires and deserves special attention because of the risky behaviour they often engage in and practice in their daily lives.

This study examines the relationship between personality traits on the one hand and risky behaviour and fan identity on the other. An alternative five-factor model comprising five fundamental dimensions (Zuckerman, 2002) - Activity, Aggression-Hostility, Impulsive Sensation Seeking, Neuroticism-Anxiety, and Sociability - serves as the framework for analyzing personality traits. The need for general activity is included in the category of activity, as well as impatience and anxiety when these requirements cannot be met. Aggression-Hostility is a propensity for verbal violence in addition to abusive, inconsiderate or anti-social behaviour, retaliation, meanness and impatience towards others. Impulsive sensation seeking involves a tendency to behave impulsively, accompanied by an inability to plan for possible outcomes. There is also a need for constant change and novelty, a tendency to seek emotional thrills and a preference for unpredictable situations. Neuroticism-Anxiety includes emotional distress, tension, worry, fear, obsessive indecisiveness and sensitivity to criticism. Sociability indicates a tendency to enjoy parties

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and a large number of friends. It is accompanied by an intolerance of social isolation in extroverts and a tendency towards solitude in introverts (Smederevac i Mitrović, 2018).

Fan identity is defined as feeling similar, close and attached to other fans of a given team, but also to the favourite team (Vidaković, Kasap & Ombla, 2018). Fan identity also implies a high level of admiration and fulfilment that one feels from being a part of the community surrounding one's preferred team (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann, Carlson & Schrader, 1999; Wann, Royalty & Roberts, 2000; Wann & Sherman, 2019). According to Wann and colleagues (Wann et al., 1999), fan identity represents the level of psychological connection to the sports team and the degree to which the team's performance is perceived as personally relevant. Following the basic tenets of Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identification with the team has a positive effect on the individual because it provides a sense of belonging and togetherness. Researches (Jacobson, 2003; Wann, 2006; Yamin, Suryani, Rahayu & Juniarti, 2022; Cardoso & Manoel de Almeida, 2023) have shown that social connection is the number one motive for being a member of a fan club. The individual's self-confidence and sense of competence is enhanced by the positive evaluation of his or her group.

Risky behaviour is a social phenomenon that has several aspects, including legal, cultural, economic, psychological, and social. It can be defined as voluntary behaviour that occurs when there is a specific level of objective or subjective risk (Mitrović, Smederevac, Grujičić & Čolović, 2006). The most common risky behaviours among adolescents are: using cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, frequently changing sexual partners, participating in theft, etc. The study of protective factors for risky behaviour, i.e. the circumstances that most shield a young person from participating in various risky activities, has received a lot of interest in research in recent years. The most frequently mentioned protective factors are (Bogetić & Jugović, 2019):

- personality traits (regarding temperamental predispositions, but also positive self-image, etc.),
- the quality of interactions between the child and the environment (infant-parent attachment, integrating with peers, etc.),
- mesosystem and exosystem aspects (family-school cooperation, school-based preventive programmes, etc.).

As personality traits are considered to be both a risk factor and a protective factor for risky behaviour, this research represents an attempt to identify those traits that can be recognised as significant to the phenomenon of risky behaviour and fan identity.

Basic personality dimensions not only play a role in differentiating those who will engage in risky activities from those who will engage in safe, non-risky activities, but also play a role in the propensity to engage in certain types of behaviour. Personality factors can work in two directions: personality traits increase the likelihood that an individual will engage in some form of risky behaviour, and on the other hand, personality traits can be protective factors in resisting negative influences and avoiding risky behaviour. Several authors have shown that risky behaviours such as psychoactive substance use, risky driving, risky sexual behaviour and gambling are clustered, i.e. people who are prone to one of these behaviours are also more likely to engage in other forms of risky behaviour (Bartusch, Lynam, Moffitt & Silva, 1997; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000; Lianopoulos et al. 2020). Negative social evaluation is a common feature of the risky behaviours mentioned above. It is important to note that cheering, both in domestic and foreign literature, is often associated with violent and aggressive behaviour (Bailey, 2009). Most personality models include the trait of aggressiveness among the basic dispositions that are present to a greater or lesser extent in all members of the general population and that can manifest themselves in various socially acceptable or unacceptable ways. Wakefield and Wann (Wakefield & Wann, 2006) use the term "dysfunctional fans" to refer to identified fans, to emphasise the tendency of this group to engage in aggressive, violent and problematic behaviour. These authors suggest that dysfunctional fans are characterised by impulsivity, antisocial attitudes and behaviour outside the sporting environment, and therefore suggest that future research should be directed towards investigating these characteristics, which are further facilitated by the atmosphere of sporting events themselves. Bearing this assumption in mind, it can be expected that the fan identity will be associated with impulsive and aggressive tendencies, as well as with lower levels of anxiety (Sheehy, 2022).

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main aim of present research was to investigate the relationship between personality traits (activity, aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism/anxiety and sociability) with fan identity and risky behavior (health-risk behaviour and exploratory behaviour). More specifically, we are interested in whether the possession of certain personality traits leads to the development of a fan identity

and a tendency towards risky behavior.

The sample consisted of 82 young fans from Serbia (53 male and 29 female), average age AS=22.50, SD=2.91).

The following measures were used: 1) Zuckerman-Kulman personality questionnaire (ZKPQ - 50 - CC) (Mitrović, Čolović & Smederevac, 2009), which is designed to determine the degree of expression of five basic personality dimensions: Activity; Aggression-Hostility; Impulsive Sensation Seeking; Neuroticism-Anxiety; Sociability; 2) Fan Identity Questionnaire (UNI) (Otašević & Sekereš, 2015) which measures the degree of identification with a particular sports club; 3) Adolescent Exploratory and Risk Behaviour Rating Scale (AERRS) (Skaar, 2009), which consists of two subscales - Exploratory behaviour and Health-risk behavior. Table 1 shows the reliability of the used measures.

Table 1. Degree of reliability of the instruments used

	Number of items	$\alpha$
Activity	10	0.70
Aggression-Hostility	10	0.71
Impulsive Sensation Seeking	10	0.69
Neuroticism-Anxiety	10	0.70
Sociability	10	0.70
Fan Identity	7	0.91
Exploratory Behaviour	29	0.80
Health-risk behavior	14	0.89

Source: Pavicevic, Simic & Stanojevic

### 3. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the descriptive indicators for the variables of personality traits, fan identity and risky behaviour. The most pronounced characteristics are aggression/hostility, sociability and activity. Fan identity is average, while exploratory behaviour is more pronounced in relation to health-risk behavior.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators for variables of personality traits, fan identity and risky behaviour

	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
Activity	82	16	26	20,61	2,46
Aggression-Hostility	82	20	29	23,44	2,48
Impulsive Sensation Seeking	82	10	20	16,27	2,43
Neuroticism-Anxiety	82	10	20	14,49	2,48
Sociability	82	28	38	22,50	2,09
Fan Identity	82	7	34	21,26	7,46
Health-risk Behaviour	82	1	35	14,43	8,42
Exploratory behaviour	82	16	74	41,42	14,37

Source: Pavicevic, Simic & Stanojevic

Legend: N - number of respondents; Min – Minimum; Max.- Maximum; AM- Arithmetic Mean; SD – Standard Deviation

Table 3 shows the correlation of personality traits with fan identity and risky behavior. The results of the correlation analysis show that only activity as a personality trait is related to fan identity. Health-risk behaviour as the first aspect of risky behavior is significantly positively correlated with aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking and neuroticism/anxiety. Exploratory behaviour as the second aspect of risky behaviour is positively correlated with impulsive sensation seeking, sociability, and aggression/hostility.

Table 3. Correlation of personality traits with fan identity and risky behavior

	activity	aggression/hostility	impulsive sensation seeking	neuroticism/anxiety	sociability
fan identity	.222*	-.022	.078	-.174	.087
Health-risk behaviour	-.052	.340**	.360**	.334**	.138
exploratory behaviour	.129	.259*	.329**	.066	.244*

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01

Source: Pavicevic, Simic & Stanojevic

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study support those of earlier studies (Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Reysen, Plante, Roberts & Gerbasi, 2015) and demonstrate that activity is the most prominent personality trait associated with fan identity. People who prefer challenging and demanding duties, who are very enthusiastic about their jobs and the tasks that are assigned to them, who are inclined towards general activity, display a stronger sense of team identity. This result can be explained by the fact that sports fans are typically more active and likely to seek out new activities, events and excitement. The positive correlation between Activity as a dimension of personality and fan identity can be interpreted as part of a pattern that guarantees a reasonably responsible method of fandom. Research has already acknowledged the significance of Activity, which is a dimension of personality, as an extraverted trait. Based on the context of other behaviors that show a tendency towards general activity, it can be assumed that these are not behaviors that can directly threaten one's safety and that people with high scores on this dimension basically cheer safely. While the activity dimension is related to fan identity, other personality dimensions of the Zuckerman-Kulman personality model did not show interpretive significance. The results of this research demonstrate that it is unjustified to attribute aggressiveness, impulsiveness, anxiety and support for violence to sports fans who support a specific team, cheer for it, rejoice in its successes and identify with its other fans. Our findings suggest that identifying with the team alone is not related to aggressive or antisocial behaviour. However, activity stands out as an important personality trait for team identification. Depending on the type of risky activity, the research indicates that the propensity to engage in it may be related to a specific set of individual variations.

On the other hand, the research indicates that the tendency to engage in health-risk behaviours may be associated with a specific set of individual differences, depending on the type of risky behaviour. More precisely, it was demonstrated that health-risk behaviour, as the first aspect of risky behavior is statistically strongly correlated with aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking and neuroticism/anxiety. Exploratory behaviour, another aspect of risky behaviour, has also a statistically significant relationship with aggression/hostility, impulsive sensation seeking and sociability. Some of the ways that people who are prone to aggression, impulsive sensation seeking and neuroticism can satiate their craving for excitement and adventure are through sports and cheering. These people are innovative in their approach to organising their free time and are constantly searching for new stimuli. But to be pleasurable, the stimulation must be of a higher intensity, and cheering is exactly this kind of stimulation. Cheering is thought to be one way in which these individuals express their need to participate in dynamic events. People with high levels of neuroticism are generally more susceptible to health risks. As these people are unable to cope with stress and problems appropriately, they avoid situations in which they have to deal with them, which in this case leads to health risks.

In this paper, we have only examined some of the determinants of identification with a fan group. However, fan identity is a much broader phenomenon than violent behaviour and includes other cognitive, affective, and behavioural components in addition to aggressiveness (Jones, 1997). Future research should examine other potential sources of fan identity variance, such as, for example, self-esteem, different social motives, situational and other variables. Identifying the factors that lead to the manifestation of risky behaviour in our population is extremely important due to the observed increase in risky behavior in the current social context.

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